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Waiting for Kenny Chesney
by Ellee Thalheimer

"I have to stop thinking about my crotch," thought Joanie.

Touring by bike through the high desert during the summer instigated battle between chammie and flesh. Joanie hadn't examined her body in a mirror for weeks. Full-length mirrors were not a camp ground amenity.

"And thank God," thought Joanie.

She was sure that if she twisted and craned in front of a mirror to see what her butt was up to, something Picassoesque would reveal itself or maybe something reminiscent of a Jackson Pollock masterpiece.

She really had to stop thinking about her crotch. Yet, there is always the unexplored chammie butter route to ponder. That might be a good investment. She did have some Neosporin in her after-thought-of-medkit crushed in a sandwich baggie at the bottom of the left pannier. That may be a comparable substitute. But wait. That's sick.

Ok, for real this time, Joanie was determined to think about a different subject. And, just as it goes for a bike tourist, the mental battle persisted as she rode the long highway taffeyed around bulging mountains and canyons cracked with dryness.

A bike tourist is utterly left with their own thoughts like a traveler being dumped off on a dusty curb at a bus driver's final stop. The weary traveler looks around and sees tumble weed and one hotel. With no other choice, the traveler checks in. They wander the labyrinth of hallways, running fingers over outdated, textured wall paper and stand in the sunlight streaming through fantastic bay windows. Then they try to find comfort as they lie in the bed they have made for themselves.

Good. She was finally thinking about a different subject. It struck Joanie that today she was grateful her mind was playing a skipping crotch record. At least it wasn't replaying the divorce or the way her mother acted at Christmas last year or the dramatic diatribes of what she "should have said" in various emails and important conversations over the last five years. This is progress. Who would have thought that a crotch-centric day would be progress.

She rolled up to a small high desert town that was like most other high desert towns in Oregon. There was a gas station and a greasy spoon where truckers ate freedom fries in super-sized portions. People stared at Joanie and her pannier-laden bike, Flash. They stared unabashed and not inconvenienced by the usual social decorum that said, "do not stare." It was as if Joanie was so foreign that she assumed zoo animal status. At first, Joanie did feel like a caged animal in these small towns and left almost before coming. After a month on the road, however, she had become used to it and apathetic as a sloth.

Outside the café after lunch, Joanie frowned with hammock in hand. The exposed, sun-hammered environ didn't care a bit about its barrenness and lack of post-meal hammock spots. Then the crash of the café's flimsy screen door slamming open interrupted Joanie's consternation. Without looking, she would have expected to turn and see a bouncer built like a concrete pillar skulking in the doorway looking for a stiffer.

Instead, when she turned, she saw hair like fireworks. Amazing. The hair-do was an eighties rendition of a hair cut imitated from a 1996 Cosmo Magazine...and it was brandishing itself in front of Joanie's face right here in 2007 in all its sticky, jazzercise glory. This

historically rich hair style encompassed bad hair choices spanning generations. Wonderful.

On the porch of the café, smoldering like the cigarette she just lit, was the kind of woman who busted up pick-up trucks in country songs. Her stone washed jeans, equipped with bowed ankle zippers, hugged a butt that still perked to attention, but threatening to sag. In the twilight of her prime, she could still pull off the make-up she wore in that small town kind of way. But just barely.

“What happened to you?” the woman asked with smoke seeping from her mouth and nose.

Joanie looked down at herself.

The chicken-fried diva furrowed her plucked brow and eye-balled the crusted salt lines on Joanie’s black lycra, her smudged men’s undershirt, and her legs bitten by the chain (not to mention the ugly space shoes that clacked better than the woman’s very own red high heels).

“What’s your deal?” she inquired further and she leaned a hip on a faded wooden bench.

Joanie thought for a second.

“I can’t stop thinking about my crotch.”

“Girl, you know, me too. Amen. But if you think Jesse is going to hog-tie me down in the Dodge flat bed of monogamy, you’ve got another thing coming. I’m waiting for my Kenny Chesney. Smoke?”

“No thanks.”

Joanie was hungry again so she unwrapped a Cliff Bar from her handle bar bag, and it pillaged her mouth of all saliva. She customarily offered a chunk of the banana bread bar to the woman.

“No thanks.”

Joanie shrugged and lamented the lack of a hammock spots afresh. The woman smoked her Virginia Slim and Joanie munched for several minutes.

“Lots of hills, huh?” the lady asked.

“Yeah,” said Joanie, her response caked in Cliff Bar.

“Does that suck?”

“No.”

“Yeah, right,” said the woman as she fanned herself with copy of the café menu that doubled as a disposable place mat, “I bet you just do it for the downhill.”

“Naw, it’s all pretty much uphill in one way or another. I’m just learning how to endure it and react better.”

“Brilliant.”

With that, the woman flicked the quarter-finished cig and left as quakingly as she came with her hair quivering like Rockette jazz hands of farewell.